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Crossing the Threshold:
A Survey of the Women in Alberta's 21st Legislative Assembly

Submitted to The Honourable
Speaker of the Legislative
Assembly of Alberta

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Edmonton, July 1987

"I have heard an original remark to the effect that home is woman's sphere. I quite agree with it; I think it is, and I go further and say I think it is a man's sphere also.... It has been a woman's high privilege to work as a slave [in factory workshops] and people do not say that was outside of woman's sphere, but when women begin to invade man's sphere, then we hear about women's place."

- from an address to the National Council of Women, Canada (1897) (Cochrane, 13)

"No woman, idiot, lunatic or child shall vote"

- from the Election Act, Dominion of Canada (Cochrane, 12)

"The law is a reflection of public sentiment, and when people begin to realize that women are human and have human needs and ambitions and desires, the law will protect a woman's interest."

- Nellie McClung, 1915 (In Times Like These , 92)

In the not so distant past, convention defined women and politics as mutually exclusive, occupying different spheres. Politics was understood as a public activity conducted by men and requiring typically 'masculine' qualities. Women were identified above all with the private world of family and domestic life. Despite the fact that women in Canada have had the privilege of seeking electoral office for more than half a century, the reality is that few women seek power and even fewer are successfully elected. Elite politics remains male-dominated. Gradually but increasingly, however, women are indeed entering the world of politics.

This paper is a study of the women in Alberta's Twenty-First Legislative Assembly: women who have made the decidedly uncommon transition from citizen to political candidate and elected official. Eight of the ten women M.L.A.s participated in my research [see Appendix A]. The group includes three Cabinet Ministers, one Government backbencher, two Opposition House Leaders, and two Opposition backbenchers. Seven of the eight became M.L.A.s for the first time in the 1986 election. They range in age from 32 to 63 years. Personal interviews were conducted with each Member, during which their political careers were traced from origins to the present. Accordingly, the paper will focus on these women's pathways to politics and public office, their roles as legislators, and their views regarding women in politics. The experiences of these women will be prefaced by a brief historical overview of women in Canadian and Albertan politics.

This study makes no claim to offer a comprehensive or conclusive interpretation of the relationship between women and politics. Its primary aim is rather to trace the experiences of eight particular women currently serving at the legislative level in Alberta in an effort to discover some reasons why so many women do not become politicians and, more

significantly, why some women do cross the threshold from mass to elite-level politics. It is as exceptions to tradition that these women provide the most interest and value: 'woman for woman,' their commitment, energy, leadership and optimism point to a promising future for women in politics.

I.

In the seventy years since Canadian women achieved the legal rights to vote and hold office, their integration into legislative semblies has been slow and tenuous. The table below outlines the legislative changes affecting the political status of women in Canada: (Bashevkin, 6)

Jurisdiction	Date of female enfranchisement[a]	Legislative sponsor	Date of eligibility to hold office	First woman elected
Manitoba	28 January 1916	Liberal gov't	28 January 1916	29 June 1920
Saskatchewan	14 March 1916	Liberal gov't	14 March 1916	29 June 1919
Alberta	19 April 1916	Liberal gov't	19 April 1916	7 June 1917
British Columbia	5 April 1917	Liberal gov't	5 April 1917	24 January 1918[b]
Ontario	23 April 1917	Conserv. gov't	4 April 1919	4 August 1943
Canada	24 May 1918, full female franchise[c]	Union gov't	7 July 1919	6 December 1921
Nova Scotia	26 April 1918	Liberal gov't	26 April 1918	7 June 1960
New Brunswick	17 April 1919	Liberal gov't	9 March 1934	10 October 1967
Prince Edward Is.	3 May 1922	Liberal gov't	3 May 1922	11 May 1970
Newfoundland	13 April 1925[d]	Conserv. gov't	13 April 1925	17 May 1930[b]
Quebec	25 April 1940	Liberal gov't	25 April 1940	14 December 1961

a Denotes date of royal assent.

b Denotes victory in by-election.

c The Military Voters Act and the Wartime Elections Act, which both received royal assent in September 1917, enfranchised women who were British subjects and who had served in any branch of the military, or who had a close relative serving in the armed forces of Canada or Great Britain.

d According to this 1925 legislation, female voters had to be age 25 or over to vote, while men could vote at age 21. This disparity was rectified by the Terms of Union of Newfoundland with Canada, 1948.

Sources: Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974) and Terence H. Qualter, *The Election Process in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 9, 52

At the federal level, between 1921 and 1984 only 65 women have been elected to parliament. (Domagalski, 39) Agnes Macphail of the Progressive Party was the first woman to be elected to the House of Commons (1921); she remained the only woman M.P. for fourteen years. Only ten more women were elected before 1960. (Domagalski, 39) It has only been in the last fifteen years that the percentage of federal women candidates and elected Members has appreciably increased. In 1972, 1.8 per cent of M.P.s were female, while by 1984 the proportion had risen to 9.6 per cent. In the 1984 federal election, 15 per cent of candidates were women, and 10 per cent of all those elected (28 M.P.s) were women. (Domagalski, 39)

The history of women in Canadian politics reveals greater electoral success at the provincial level. Between 1920 and 1986, there were 155 female provincial legislators, approximately 60 per cent of which were elected in the past ten years. (Domagalski, 40) The table below shows the total number of women elected in each province since 1950, and the proportion of women M.L.A.s in 1986.

Table 2 (Domagalski, 40)

Province	Women Elected, 1950-86	Women Elected, 1986
British Columbia	18	7 (10.2 %)
Alberta	22	10 (12.0 %)
Saskatchewan	10	5 (7.8 %)
Manitoba	16	8 (14.0 %)
Ontario	16	9 (7.2 %)
Quebec	30	18 (14.8 %)
New Brunswick	7	3 (6.9 %)

Prince Edward Island	6	3 (9.3 %)
Newfoundland	2	1 (5.8 %)
	Total: 132	Total: 67

Proportionately, more women have been elected in the western provinces. The western provinces were the first to extend the vote to women and the first to elect female provincial legislators. While Alberta was the third province to legislate female enfranchisement (April, 1916, just after Manitoba and Saskatchewan) it holds the honour of electing the first two women to a legislature in Canada: Louise McKinney and Lieutenant Roberta MacAdams in June, 1917. Alberta aslo boasts the second woman Cabinet Minister in Canada: Irene Parlby became Minister without Portfolio in 1921, only months after British Columbia has appointed the first. However, it was not until 1973 that Alberta appointed a woman to a Cabinet post with full portfolio: Helen Hunley, as Solicitor General. (Bashevkin, 6; Report on Alberta Elections , 9; Cochrane, 40)

Various theories have been formulated for the relative success of women in provincial politics and particularly in the West. The fact that provincial legislatures are closer to home and generally have shorter sessions makes them easier to combine with family life. Some analysts have pointed to "lower levels of professionalization that have characterized western provincial legislatures" and a "greater equality ascribed to frontier women" (Brodie,19), while others have focused on the New Democratic Party's greater strength in the West and to that party's greater receptiveness to female candidates. (Brodie, 19; Cochrane, 77) The West's less entrenched social and political fabric may also be an important factor in explaining its apparent greater acceptance of women in the

non-traditional role of politician.

In the 1986 Alberta election, 48 of 333 candidates were women (14 per cent), and 10 out of 83 elected were women (12 per cent). (1986 Election Report , B1-12) These ten women represent almost half of the total number of women elected in Alberta since 1950 (22). (Domagalski, 40) The following table reveals the breakdown by party of female candidacies in the last three elections in Alberta: (Bashevkin, 72; 1986 Election Report)

Election	P.C.	N.D.P.	Liberal
1979	6.3 %	13.9 %	27.8 %
	(5/79)	(11/79)	(22/79)
1982	7.6 %	15.2 %	16.7 %
	(6/79)	(12/79)	(5/30)
1986 *	12.0%	20.5 %	14.3 %
	(10/83)	(17/83)	(9/63)

*Twelve women ran for the following parties: Representative Party of Alberta - 4; Western Canada Concept - 3; Independents - 3; Confederation of Regions Party - 1; Communist Party of Alberta - 1.

Generally, women's rate of participation in electoral politics in Alberta is increasing, although it should be noted that a full quarter of the female candidates in the 1986 election ran for fringe parties and as such stood little chance of being elected. I will now turn to an examination of the experiences which motivated the eight women in my study to become politically active and run for public office.

II.

> With respect to social psychological barriers... both women and men are constrained by conventional patterns of gender role socialization, which define the former according to passive, private, and apolitical norms, and the latter according to aggressive, public and political ones. Socialization thus restricts female access to elite positions in two ways: first, by defining women in a collective sense as properly outside of politics; and second, by perpetuating a masculine 'ideal type' of political activist. (Bashevkin, 156)

What experiences are shared by the eight 'exceptions to the norm' in my study? These women described varied and multiple sources of political initiation and development, including family/childhood influences, key events and individuals, occupational/career paths, volunteer activities, and party involvement.

It is initially within the family that cultural constraints against women in politics may or may not be reinforced. Some of these women grew up in a politicized home environment where they were shown early, by intimate example, that political consciousness and/or activism is a normal and positive pursuit. One Member's parents "talked politics a lot"; another Member's father was political, though not partisan ("His values were New Democratic...he sparked my interest and made me aware") while her sister was an active party member; and another Member's father was an active campaign worker("I grew up in a Liberal family"). One Government Member's parents were in the military and thus were restricted from active politics. Interestingly, however, her grandmother was one of the early founders of the Coo-operative Commonwealth Federation in the 1920's in Saskatchewan. For those who did not have political families, the absence of negative influences left the door open for political sparks later in life.

Sometimes events in childhood initiate political interest and commitment. One Member attributed her political roots partially to

experiencing the poverty and struggle of growing up on a farm during the Depression. She also pointed to World War II as a key experience committing her to peace issues. Rather than viewing war from the soldiers' perspective, as a little girl this M.L.A. saw what war meant for female relatives in Europe, as well as for the women around her who waited for their men to return. One of the Opposition M.L.A.s has a clear memory of the childhood event that sparked her political interest. She was twelve years old when she was taught in school about Tommy Douglas and Saskatchewan Medicare. She rushed home to tell her parents: "I'm gonna be a socialist!"; she became active in the N.D.P. the following year. Of course, how these women responded to these events was the crucial factor in determining their political development.

For most of these eight women, their education and professional experience served as important political training grounds. This group of M.L.A.s includes: a lawyer; a Bachelor of Arts in French and Russian Languages supplemented by Special Linguistic Studies; a Master of Arts in Political Economy; a teacher/farmer; a teacher; a Certified Psychologist working on a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology; a nurse/businesswoman; and an Occupational Therapist and social and health activist. Each Member's profession converged at some point with politics, which is a significant and encouraging fact in itself: this group of health and educational professionals and academics demonstrates that a woman, at least, need not be a lawyer or businessperson to achieve public office in Alberta.

Elaine McCoy was Senior Legal Counsel to the Public Utilities Board before practising law with a private practice in Calgary. Feeling restricted from active politics as a civil servant, she did not become active until she left her government position. Her lifelong interest in political issues and policies led her to offer her services to her local

riding association in Calgary. Eventually, her professional experience in regulatory law helped her to become Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Nancy Betkowski's languages training earned her communications-related positions in the Alberta civil service which in turn led to progressively more political positions (Executive Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs, and then to the Provincial Treasurer, for a total of ten years before her election). She describes her career as "more evolution and metamorphosis" than deliberately political. Clearly, her contact with senior officials and government Members exposed her to politics and politicians, a long apprenticeship which inspired her to one day try for public office herself.

Pam Barrett studied socialist economics at the graduate level and used her academic training for various research positions, most recently for the Alberta New Democrats. She also was the founding organizer of 'Solidarity Alberta', a coalition of community, church and labour groups formed to address social and economic concerns facing Albertans. Along with surviving a serious illness, Barrett cites her university training as changing her life. Certainly her strong analytical and theoretical background has helped her rise to the elite position of House Leader for the Official Opposition.

Shirley Cripps' long history of involvement with agricultural and rural boards, committees, and associations enabled her to develop her interest in agriculture and "feel the pulse of the community." As a teacher and farmer in her community, Cripps has certainly developed strong roots to both her constituency and all farmers whom she serves as Associate Minister of Agriculture.

As an Elementary School teacher and short-term Community Co-ordinator

for a Sexual Abuse Prevention Program, Christie Mjolsness became sensitized to social problems, especially as they afflict children. "Seeing so many poor children come to school in such a rich society" deepened her political commitment. Her awareness and concern for social problems led her to her position of Social Services critic for the Official Opposition.

Marie Laing, Education critic for the New Democrats, brings similar experiences to her current position. As an expert in educational psychology, as well as former Director of the Edmonton Sexual Assault Centre, Laing has developed and taught courses and published articles regarding education, and has served on various boards and committees regarding family violence. One of her motivations for running for public office was her frustration with submitting funding proposals that were not accepted. Laing's professional career enabled her to develop skills convergent with public life and a strong commitment to a variety of issues.

Dianne Mirosh's career as a nurse led her to serve on various hospital boards and associations which developed her interest in provincial politics and health care issues. Her business experience in health-related services provoked her to lobby the government to stop what she considered unfair competition in her area. As an M.L.A., Mirosh continues her involvement in health care by serving on various health committees.

After a short career as an Occupational Therapist and then raising her family, Bettie Hewes went on to an increasingly political series of positions. As Executive Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association, she organized a social action campaign which succeeded in improving the mental health system. As the Planner/Acting Director of the Edmonton Social Planning Council, her job was to organize community development. She worked directly with the poor, ex-convicts, seniors, and the disabled. "This work was very political" and led to her being asked to

sit on various municipal boards, from which it was "just a little step" to becoming an Edmonton Alderwoman. She held this municipal office for ten years (three and a half terms) before being appointed as Chairman of Canadian National.

To varying extents, most of these women also possess significant volunteer experience. Volunteer associations are an important milieu for political learning among female politicians in much the same way as occupations are: they expose members to political issues and personalities, cultivate political skills, and mobilize to political action by raising levels of self-confidence and ambition. Perhaps most importantly, volunteer activity can establish one's reputation and a network of contacts and supporters that occupations may not provide, especially for homemakers.

Prior to her career in formal politics, Hewes devoted a great deal of her time to numerous volunteer positions where she gained a vast amount of practical experience. She worked for such causes as preventing a freeway development, protecting inner city neighborhoods, alternative housing, emergency shelters for battered women, and racial tolerance. Similarly, Mirosh began her grassroots volunteer activity when her family was young, serving as Public Service Director of a community association. She became engaged in a six year, "very political fight" against the City of Calgary over an unpopular development. The community won, and Mirosh had gained valuable organizational skills, community awareness and contacts. Laing became actively involved in various grassroots organizations centering around peace and social causes such as violence against women in the home and on the street, childcare options, unemployment, minimum wage legislation, civil rights, women's rights. Barrett also was involved in several community organizations including a tenants' association, a business association, and an alternative childcare project.

While voluntary groups often serve as channels to politics, it is generally recognized that the political party remains the gatekeeper to public office at the provincial and federal levels. Traditionally, political tasks within party organizations in Canada have tended to be differentiated on a gender basis: women were assigned the supportive, 'housekeeping' duties such as envelope-stuffing, whereas men assumed the strategic and leadership roles. (Brodie and McCalla Vickers, 25-30) However, the partisan experiences of most of these women enabled them to gain the skills, contacts and recognition necessary for political candidacy. In addition, most of these women assured me that more women are becoming involved in their respective parties, and are rising up the hierarchies.

Cripps and McCoy were each Vice-Presidents of their respective constituency association executives, the latter having organized community surveys and public forums on policies and issues. Barrett and Mjolsness have both been active in the N.D.P. since they were teenagers, working on various election campaigns. Barrett became valued as an excellent canvasser, and Mjolsness once held the position of Vice-President for Youth (Northern Alberta). Laing's active involvement in her party did not begin until 1984: "When Grant Notley died, I felt so much hinged on him...." Her desire to help prevent the party from fading away motivated her activism, and eventually led to her being asked by the party to run. Hewes always voted for, supported and associated with active Liberals, thereby building a partisan network over the years.

Betkowski also built a network of party contacts over time, but was not actively recruited by her party. Indeed, she had to overcome a male candidate with strong party connections in order to gain her nomination. Mirosh considered herself an 'outsider,' although she had worked on several

election campaigns and was a leadership delegate in 1985. However, her constituency association was a 'closed shop' and supported an active party person. She surprised the party with her solid community support.

Of course, there are factors in addition to professional, volunteer, and partisan experiences which motivate people to run for office. Some of these women had especially interesting or significant 'other reasons.' One Member agreed to run because she felt she had something to offer (skills, commitment) and because she was inspired by the advice of Dr. Helen Caldicott: 'Nothing will change until women get elected to law-making bodies.' Another Member, despite strong encouragement from her party to run, had strong self-doubt which was compunded by advice from the former (male) candidate who dissuaded her completely — until the next day, when she discovered his secret aspirations for the nomination. This event cemented her resolve to gain the candidacy. One Member was persistently encouraged by the incumbent in her riding, then-Premier Peter Lougheed , to try for the nomination in the next election. Betkowski spent years in the midst of politicians and gained the following insight: "I saw people in public life, some who were doing a good job, and others who weren't... I realized how important it is to have people with integrity in public positions." Among the people who inspired her were Lougheed, and former Treasurer, Lou Hyndman. She did not experience the 'election bug' until she ran for nomination as a leadership delegate in 1985.

Despite their diversity, the experiences of these eight women M.L.A.s share several common features. Some of the women did not grow up in actively political homes, but most did spend their early years in family environments that encouraged political consciousness and, in some cases, partisan activism. All of the women followed educational and occupational paths which converged directly with community service and in many cases,

social action. To varying extents, all of the women had formal party connections before their election. Finally, many of these women were fortunate enough to cross paths with inspirational leaders in public life. Most significantly, it was a combination of factors that enabled each of these women to become successful political candidates, a combination that few people, and even fewer women, achieve.

III.

When discussing their roles as legislators, these eight women naturally divided along the government/opposition line. All of the women have brought their convictions and commitment to the Legislature, and the extent to which each member has been fulfilled or frustrated has depended largely on the level of power she holds.

On the Government side, the three Cabinet Ministers are especially positive. In addition to her portfolio of Education, Betkowski is also interested in provincial jurisdiction and preserving a federal-provincial balance. She also perceives the need for her party and government to examine social issues closely and resolve a growing conflict between economic and social issues. She stated: "This is one of the areas where I think I can contribute." Betkowski believes her position to be on an equal footing with that of her male counterparts and does not feel any encumbrance regarding her potential within Cabinet.

McCoy sees herself as filling three roles: as an M.L.A., she serves her constituency and as a caucus member she helps to make major policy guidelines;as a member of Cabinet, she helps to make major policy decisions; and as the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, she heads

that department. She derives most satisfaction from helping constituents, and considers her most frustrating experiences to be "having good ideas but not enough money to implement them anymore." Her chief concern thus far has been wrestling with the budget and coming to terms with the deficit. McCoy intends to run again and be 'more effective' in a second term but believes it is not healthy to stay in politics too long.

Both McCoy and Cripps mentioned the inefficient, time-consuming nature of the parliamentary system, but both also recognized the value of checks and balances for the protection of society. Cripps feels best about the things she has been able to accomplish for her constituents since being elected. The issues that concern her include: agriculture and energy; development of world trade in agriculture and forestry, and tourism; and education funding.

Mirosh has been able to continue her interest in health care, especially long-term care for seniors, and is also concerned about culture and 'women's issues.' Her frustrations include her limited knowledge of law and legislation, keeping up with constituency demands, and having to learn so much so quickly as a rookie M.L.A.

On the other side of the House, two of the women M.L.A.s occupy elite-level strategic decision-making positions within their respective caucuses. Barrett is House Leader for the Official Opposition, as well as Culture, Multiculturalism and Women's critic (she is also backup Finance critic).She is vocal about the status of women in Alberta and is frustrated at the bias against women she perceives in this government's policies. She considers the erosion of women's rights in Alberta to be a major political issue (see Mitchell, B1). Barrett aspires to be re-elected, but as government, "so that we can actually make a difference."

The other three women in the opposition echo the frustration at being

powerless. Hewes is House Leader for the Liberals, as well as their critic for Hospitals and Medical Care, Social Services, Community and Occupational Health, Municipal Affairs, Labour, Culture, Advanced Education, and Women's Issues. She feels she has been successful in raising awareness of issues, but has no great sense of accomplishment. Because she was able to achieve much during her aldermanic tenure, Hewes was not prepared for never winning anything as an Opposition M.L.A.: "Our questions are not answered, our bills are not supported, our analysis is ignored... that's very hard to handle, it's very frustrating." She points to the fact that the parliamentary system "is set up to be confrontational, to oppose one another" and that although politics is the art of compromise, the chances for compromise within this system are minimal. Hewes also aspires to be elected as a government M.L.A., and to continue being "a voice for the least powerful in society."

Like Hewes, Laing also comes from a position of influence and acutely feels her lack of power as an M.L.A.: "As a director of a community agency I had more power and credibility." She feels she can only raise issues rather than make effective/meaningful changes. She has concentrated on her critic areas - Education (funding cutbacks, user fees, bilingualism) and the Public Service (pay equity bill) as well as on peace issues (two motions). Laing is frankly cynical about the parliamentary system: "Though it's an improvement over the battlefield, it's not much." She believes that where there sometimes could be a meeting of minds, the system frustrates such consensus and compromise, reducing all issues to win-lose situations. Laing sees legislative politics as one way of being involved in important issues but "only one way... I can't decide yet if it's the best way." She has not ruled out the possibility of running for federal office, however.

Laing's colleague, Mjolsness, also feels frustrated by the limited power of the opposition and her inability to change the government's policy direction, especially regarding poverty and unemployment. She also cites her inexperience and limited knowledge in some areas as being drawbacks. Mjolsness lists as positive aspects of her political career: meeting people, "keeping the government on its toes," working to increase awareness, and working with a group of conscientious people. Though she enjoys being an M.L.A., she plans to someday return to teaching and expand into administration and counselling.

Although the roles and issue areas of these eight women are diverse, general patterns are evident. All of the women seem to have special concerns for social issues, regardless of party or position. And, despite disappointments and frustrations, almost every one of these women plans to seek re-election --all of them, of course, hoping to part of the government.

IV.

Women politicians are generally confronted with varying degrees of gender stereotyping, biased or even discriminatory treatment from both the public and their colleagues. Motherhood and family responsibilities pose additional gender 'problems' for women in politics. This section will explore the experiences of the eight women which stem directly from their gender, and how they have handled such pressures.

Most of the women agreed they feel more exposed and scrutinized than male politicians, partly because their numbers are smaller but mostly because of socialized expectations about women. Their comments included:

"There is a different set of rules, but I think that's changing"; "Men could get away with more than women, by far...women have to be scrupulously morally clean"; "Women have to be so careful of how they say things...if a woman makes a stupid remark, she makes it for all womankind"; "Women have to be generalists and as articulate as the most articulate man, because that is who they'll be compared with"; "Whenever women speak out stongly, they're discounted as 'shrill,' 'single-issue types,' 'stubborn,' 'over-reacting,' or 'emotional' "; "People are waiting for you to fail...women have to work three times as hard as any man"; "A lot of women are harder on us than men are; as a woman to other women is the hardest"; "Society assumes things about women, and these assumptions are built into judgements, such as 'women are softer' or 'women take things more personally' or 'women have down-swings every month'; we tend to be judged as if we're not really players in the same league."

Several of the women described stereotyping incidents. One Member provided the following anecdote which occurred during her campaign: "When I was canvassing with a man, voters would push past me and shake the man's hand!" She, along with some of the other M.L.A.s, encountered voters who refused to vote for a woman, or women who felt they had to gain the approval of their husband before committing their vote. One Member surprised her rival candidate (the male incumbent) when he attempted to focus the election forum on the issue of daycare to ensure a favourable comparison with his female challenger; instead, she displayed her knowledge of many other issues. Assumptions prevail that 'women know about 'women's issues' only,' 'women are not analytical,' and 'women are not knowledgeable or interested in economic matters.' Hewes descibed how she had to fight as an alderwoman to be appointed to the City's Economic Affairs (budget) and Utilities and Engineering Committees because her colleagues wondered 'what

could she possibly know about such things?' Most of these women confessed they cope with these biases by over-compensating. One analyst comments: "because women in general are expected to be more emotional, more talkative, less familiar wih the facts, women legislators are determined to be none of these things." (Jaquette, xxvii)

Despite such experiences, these women definitely provide signs of hope. Every one of them stressed that the bias against women in politics is lessening and "attitudes are changing." One Member offered the following: "I think that for every person that thinks that because I'm a woman I will not do as good a job as a man, there are ten people out there who are confident I can do the job well." Mirosh's riding, which is a high-income, professional area of Calgary, shows a particularly high acceptance of women politicians, with two female city councillors, a female M.L.A., and the only female M.P. in Alberta. The 'old boys' network' is certainly still a reality which all women politicians must deal with, but it seems to be becoming less of a barrier.

Another of the realities most women in politics must deal with is the often conflicting roles of politician, and wife and mother. Are the responsibilities of family life and public-policy making roles incompatible? To be a successful politician, must a woman deny herself a family entirely? Or, at best, must she wait until her children are grown? If she has a family and still seeks political positions, will she be forced by circumstances to deny her family the traditional benefits politically non-active women give? Is there a distinction between being a 'wife' and 'mother,' and an 'ideal wife/mother,' that is, the ideal our society and culture prescibes? Why is it that female political candidates, like female professionals, are most often asked 'But what will you do with your children?' while their male counterparts are seldom, if ever, asked that

question? The women in this study, interestingly, were eager to discuss the advantages of motherhood as it relates to politics. However, all agreed that domestic roles do significantly constrain political activity by women.

Of these eight women, three are single, four are mothers of grown children (one is divorced) and one is a mother of an infant. The single Members admit politics has been an easier way of life because they have never married, although one did mention that unmarried female politicians also do not have the support of someone as intimate as a spouse. One of the single Members, when asked how she is different from other women and other women politicians because of her elite-level position, pointed to the fact that she is "highly driven, 100 per cent dedicated...and I can apply myself 100 per cent because I have no family, no spouse, no one else asking for my attention." Another unmarried M.L.A. admitted, "I don't have a private life to speak of."

The experiences and lifestyle of the mothers of grown children are vastly different. All of these women entered or re-entered the work force when their youngest was two to three years old. When first elected, all had grown children, with the youngest being about fifteen in two cases. One woman provided the following insight: "You would have a very difficult time [being a politician] if your children are younger, especially if you have to leave home [to be in the capital]; you have to have a special spouse, particularly a special husband." Another stated, "I wouldn't advise any woman to become active until your children are grown up - it's just too hard. It's impossible to be a wife, young mother, and a politician; you must be prepared to give all when a politician - the time commitment is overwhelming." This woman, who spends five of every seven days away from her home and family in a different city during session,

still plans each week's menu every Sunday before she returns to Edmonton. Another M.L.A. mused that although her family is "wonderfully supportive," they still expect her to cook, babysit and sew, which she does do, even though she admits, "I don't have the time!" Not surprisingly, few women in our society are prepared for the time and energy commitment and private-versus-public role strain which politics imposes, especially on mothers.

The one woman Member with a young child is charting a very different course. She admitted that the potential stress on her family, especially on her son, was one of the major negative factors when she was weighing whether to run for office. However, one year later, she states positively, "I'm where I want to be and I believe they're with me." This M.L.A. has three distinct advantages: she had built up considerable political experience before she had her child; her home is in the capital city; and she is able to afford quality in-home childcare. Nevertheless, she admits she experiences considerable role conflict: "there's lots of guilt," her life is "not balanced," "it's a real stress." Although her husband is very supportive, she intimated that because men are still socialized differently, he feels he should be 'the provider.' Despite such stresses, this mother is ultimately and strongly positive about the path she has chosen. People ask her 'Is that really where a mother should be?' and she replies "I believe I'm a better mother because I'm working." She believes deeply that motherhood and politics "are not mutually exclusive" and suggests it may be better for mothers to work or be active in politics when their children are either very young or adult, rather than in between. Though her position is particularly demanding, this Member finds that "politics creates its own energy - it's creative energy for me." As somewhat of a pioneer, she is a particularly encouraging role model.

Other Members also emphasized the complementary aspects of motherhood and politics. One Member stated, "Child-rearing is a wonderful training ground for everything," such as organizational skills, empathy, responsibility for others, and a wholistic perspective. One Member assured me that women absorb and deal with conflict very well: "You can't raise four kids without learning how to resolve conflict!" Another Member compared having to remain calm and appease a crying baby, to remaining calm and determining the best course of action when faced with an irrational person at a meeting. One of the women also mentioned her first-hand experience of putting her children through the education system as being particularly valuable.

Wife and mother roles clearly do affect the pace and direction of women's political careers, as well as their anxieties once they are elected. This is largely due to the fact that our society generally undervalues the particular perspective and skills that home-making and motherhood develop, especially in any political sense. Considering that most women become mothers at some point in their lives, it is vital that society and political parties examine the extent to which biology and gender roles restrict women from political activity. One political analyst writes:

> ...the equal integration of women in politics (as in business or the professions) is unlikely until the prescriptions of traditional gender roles are relaxed and redirected. As long as women are assigned primary responsibility for homemaking and child-rearing, their political activism will likely be constrained.
>
> (Brodie, 94)

Sweden offers an interesting example of how legislation making it easier for women to combine domestic responsibilities with outside employment can affect women's political status. The country has developed progressive policies such as liberalized marriage laws, greater access to birth control education, maternity/paternity leave, employment equity, and

reducing gender stereotyping in schools. (Randall, 118-120) Not coincidentally, Sweden also has one of the highest proportions of women legislators amongst all Western democracies - currently approximately 30 per cent. (Domagalski, 40; see Appendix B for a list of other countries' rates in the 1980's)

Would more women M.L.A.s make a difference in Alberta politics? The current women M.L.A.s generally believe women make subtle but significant differences in politics. One Member described how she did not think of herself when she ran for office as a 'woman politician,' but a year later realizes "how important it is to get more women to run in our party." She believes women have different priorities than men, and that the Legislature needs more balance, a view echoed by most of the others. An analyst of Canadian politics observes the following regarding the increasing participation of women in politics:

> "Women's problems," which were previously treated as personal matters and thus were incompatible with politics, have been increasingly redefined as political. It is acknowledged that formal decision-making structures can deal with these problems.
>
> (Brodie, 126)

One Opposition Member stated that if more women were elected for her party, "it would make a lot of difference...if we were government, in the sense that women's perspectives would be legitimized and validated by specific policy orientation." Regarding style, one Member believes women have especially good negotiating skills "because of all they have to go through to gain public credibility."

These women believe there are several crucial factors which continue to hinder women from attempting politics. First, there are the psychological factors which are a result of centuries of conditioning: women are socialized to be private, not public; domestic, not professional; dependent; not risk-takers. Most of the M.L.A.s pointed to the fact that

many women still have poor self-images and low self-confidence levels. One Member admitted she almost did not run for nomination because she felt she "did not know enough." Money is considered by many analysts to be the most obvious structural barrier facing women in politics. (Bashevkin, 157) Although none of the women in this study experienced financial problems, many acknowledged that because there are no spending limits or tax concessions for nomination campaigns, many women especially find it difficult to compete, particularly in ridings where their party is competitive. Moreover, most critics concur that "the nomination to a competitive riding is the key to increasing the number of women at the legislative level." (Domagalski,42; see also Brodie, 117-119)

While many barriers still exist, most of the women in this study believe opportunities are increasing and more women are getting involved in politics. Several Members referred to a 'bubble' coming through in the professions which they believe will spread into political careers. These current women politicians offered useful advice to this rising generation of women political activists. One Member stressed, "Don't let your self-doubt lead the way or control where you go; channel it into more creative uses." Similarly, other Members stated that women must work consciously to improve their self-confidence, and value their capacity and potential: "Women need to get a sense of themselves and of the power within themselves...and we do have it." One Member mentioned the importance of maturity and experience, and several emphasized the need to work in community organizations to build grassroots communication, skills, and a network of support. Regarding party involvement, one Member advised," Don't just agree to do the baking and sign-posting -- get involved with policy development and implementation." Another spoke of the need for women to bridge the gap between commitment to issues and electoral

politics. The strongest and most frequent advice these women offered was "Go for it!" and "More than anything, get involved!" Although these women candidly described their frustrations and challenges, every Member was ultimately very confident and encouraging about their place in Alberta politics and the potential for other women who aspire to be politicians in this province.

V.

One of the women in this study stated: "Women in public life have to be twice as good as men to get anywhere. Fortunately, we are." Unfortunately, it seems, most women still have to be. However, while the eight women legislators in this study are indeed exceptional, it should be remembered that they themselves stressed that they are not impossible ideals. It is to be hoped that more women in Alberta will follow in their steps so that the number of women representatives in our elected assembly may one day democratically reflect their numbers in society.

APPENDIX A

I would like to thank the following M.L.A.s who so generously participated in my study:

Progressive Conservative Government Members

- Honourable Nancy Betkowski (Edmonton-Glenora), Minister of Education
- Honourable Shirley Cripps (Drayton Valley), Associate Minister of Agriculture
- Honourable Elaine McCoy (Calgary-West), Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs
- Dianne Mirosh (Calgary-Glenmore)

New Democrat Official Opposition Members

- Pam Barrett (Edmonton-Highlands)
- Marie Laing (Edmonton-Avonmore)
- Christie Mjolsness (Edmonton-Calder)

Liberal Opposition Member

-Bettie Hewes (Edmonton-Gold Bar)

The M.L.A.s were each asked the following questions in a series of personal interviews:

1. What is your educational/career background?

2. What sparked your interest in politics?

3. At what age, approximately, did you first become politically active, in terms of attending party meetings and working on election campaigns? What motivated you to become active in your party at that stage in your life?

4. Can you describe briefly the kinds of political activities in which you were involved in these early years?

5. Did you take a break in your political work to accommodate family responsibilities, other employment, etcetera?

6. How did you become involved as a legislator? Can you recall any particular individual or event which encouraged you to seek public office?

7. Did you experience any financial difficulties in gaining your nomination?

8. To what extent has your family been supportive of your political career?

9. Looking more specifically at your work as a legislator, what are the most important responsibilities attached to your position?

10. How would you describe your main contributions in this political role? In what areas have you been less successful?

11. What issues have concerned you most? Have you been frustrated in your pursuit of any of these concerns?

12. What impressions, overall, do you have of your experiences in party politics? In your view, what are the major positive and negative features of work as a legislator?

13. Turning to your political aspirations, have you considered pursuing other types of party work in the future? Do you have career aspirations outside of politics?

14. To what extent does party discipline affect the status of 'women's issues' in your caucus?

15. What are the main activities in which you see women, as compared with men, participating in your party? Would you say that your own experiences are typical or atypical of other female politicians?

16. In your view, what factors may hinder the appointment of women to the most powerful and influential Cabinet portfolios, such as treasury, industry and trade, energy, justice?

17. How would you describe the attitudes of male partisans with whom you interact on a regular basis? Have these attitudes changed over time?

18. In light of sexual stereotyping and discrimination, do you think our society makes it difficult to be a woman politician? Have you encountered such barriers, and if so, how have you handled them?

19. What reasons would you offer to explain the relative lack of women in Alberta politics? Do you believe that, in the near future, more women will become involved?

20. What advice would you offer to women who seek to become politically active?

A P P E N D I X B

The following chart depicts patterns of female candidacy and legislative office-holding at the national level in several Western democracies: (Bashevkin, 145)

Country	Year	% candidates	Year	% legislators
Britain	1918	1.2	1929	2.3
	1929	3.9	1975	4.4
	1979	8.2	1980	3.0
Denmark	1979	21.8	1945	5.4
			1970	11.8
			1979	23.0
Finland	1948	12.1	1907	9.5
	1970	17.3	1948	12.0
	1979	26.0	1970	21.5
			1979	26.0
France	1968	3.3	1945[a]	5.5
	1973	6.7	1981[a]	5.9
	1978	15.9	1981[b]	2.3
Italy	n/a		1948	7.8
			1968	2.8
			1979	8.2
Norway	1945	13.2	1969	9.3
	1957	18.0	1975	16.1
	1969	19.7	1979	23.9
Sweden	n/a		1971	14.0
			1977	22.9
			1980	27.8
United States	1979[c]	5.3	1975[d]	4.4
			1979[d]	3.7
			1983[d]	5.0

a Represents National Assembly members only.
b Represents Senate members only.
c Represents major party candidates only for House of Representatives.
d Represents House of Representatives members only. Notably, state legislatures in the United States included 4.0% women members in 1969, 9.0% in 1978, and 13.3% in 1983. U.S. Senate representation in 1983 was 2.0%.

Sources: Jill Hills, 'Britain,' in Joni Lovenduski and Jill Hills, eds., *The Politics of the Second Electorate* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 8-32; Janine Mossuz-Lavau and Mariette Sineau, 'France,' in Lovenduski and Hills, 112-33; Maria Weber, 'Italy,' in Lovenduski and Hills, 182-207; Maud Eduards, 'Sweden,' in Lovenduski and Hills, 208-27; Elina Haavio-Mannila, 'Finland,' in Lovenduski and Hills, 228-51; Walter S.G. Kohn, *Women in National Legislatures* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Ingunn Norderval Means, 'Political Recruitment of Women in Norway,' *Western Political Quarterly* 25:3 (1972), 491-521; Margaret Stacey and Marion Price, *Women, Power, and Politics* (London: Tavistock, 1981), Appendix; Monica Charlot, 'Women in Politics in France,' in Howard R. Penniman, ed., *The French National Assembly Elections of 1978* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1980); Gisbert H. Flanz, *Comparative Women's Rights and Political Participation in Europe* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Transnational, 1983); Center for the American Woman and Politics, *Women in Public Office* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978); Bella Abzug, with Mim Kelber, *Gender Gap* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984)

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